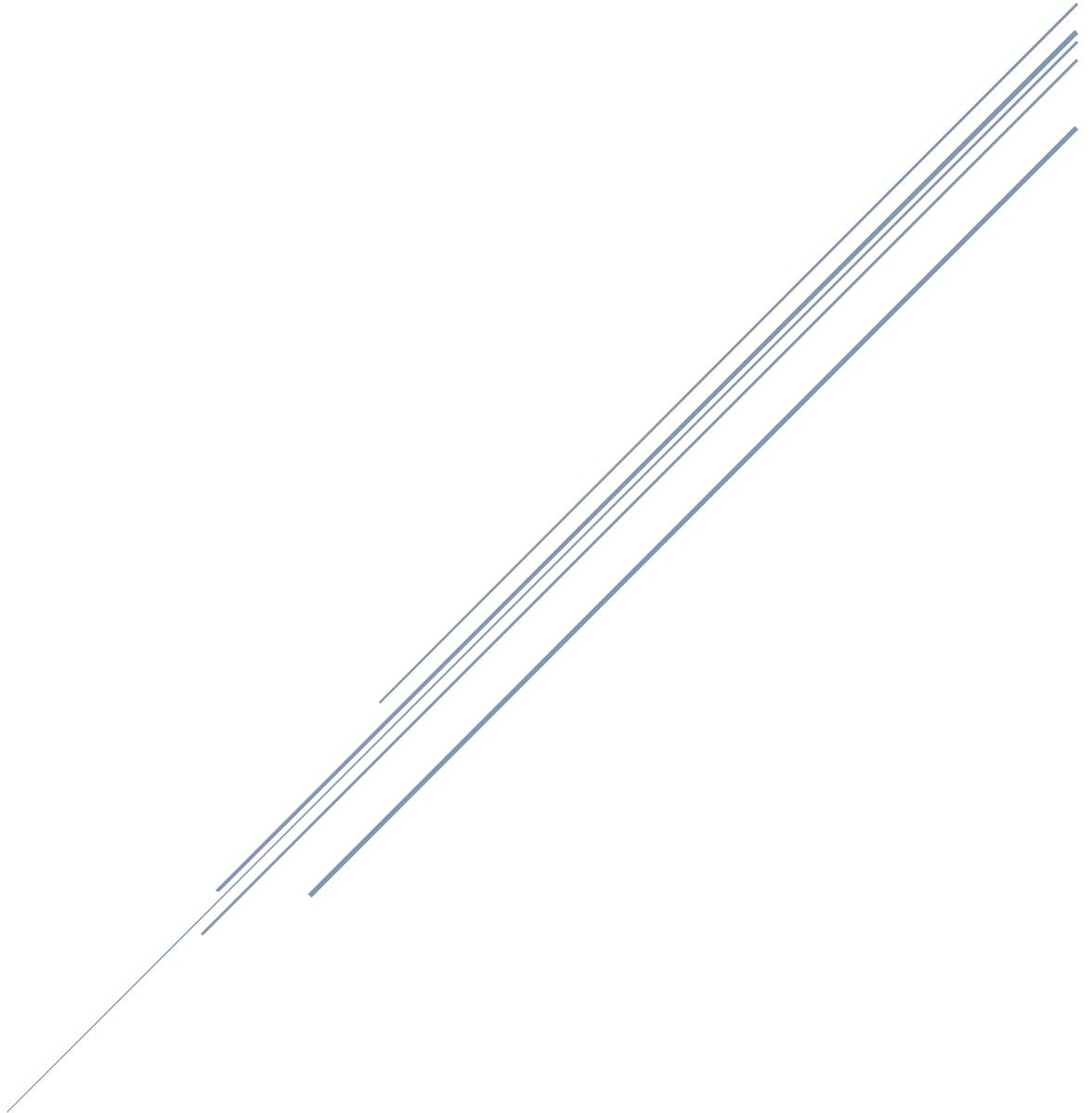


ORIGINS OF DEONTOLOGY

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To better understand the origins of Deontology, one must first understand a few terms and the distinctions between them. This will make it easier to understand Immanuel Kant, who is considered one of the main figures of Deontology – though never using that word himself.¹ There are four terms: **a priori**, **a posteriori**, **analytic**, and **synthetic**. Much of Kant’s work surrounds his famous question: “How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?”

A priori and a posteriori concern one’s knowledge upon a specific subject/topic. If one were to know what a triangle looks like without having to look at one, this would be an a priori judgment. The knowledge that one has without the need for extra sensory experience to determine its truthfulness. If one were to not know what a triangle looked like but are then shown, this would be an example of an a posteriori judgment – something known only after a sensory experience.

The terms analytic and synthetic moreover concern the truthfulness to a subject’s definition. For instance, an analytic statement could be: “All triangles have three sides.” This is true **by definition**. A synthetic statement could be: “There’s a red triangle on the sidewalk.” This is not true by the definition of a triangle. Red is not part of what makes a triangle, a triangle. This statement is therefore not necessarily true, though there very well could be a red triangle on the sidewalk. “Unlike his predecessors, Kant maintained that synthetic *a priori* judgments not only are possible

¹ Thomas Burrus. “Deontology I [Immanuel Kant I]” Class lecture, Ethics from Aiken Technical College. Aiken, SC. November 11, 2019.

but actually provide the basis for significant portions of human knowledge.”² Kant believed this to be the case with things like mathematics and science.

Kant also argued that morality worked in a similar way to these sciences. “There is nothing at all in the world, or even out of it, that could possibly be thought to be good without qualification except a **good will**.”³ In other words, what is already, objectively, good? Good will, or one could consider it intention. Deontology is really concerned with one’s duties, or obligations. Kant believed one’s obligation(s) stemmed from what he called the **categorical imperative**.

Throughout the *Groundlaying toward the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant gives us three separate forms of the categorical imperative. The first form outlines that one should only do or say something a certain way, if it were true for everyone else. Today we have a similar saying: “treat everyone the way you would like to be treated.” The second form outlines that one should treat everyone (including themselves) as an end, and never as a means. This basically means don’t use or take advantage of someone else. The third form outlines that morality involves an “Empire of Ends.”

Here Kant means that society would not function, if morality were not a communal effort. He is basically explaining that human activity/interaction in, and of itself, is a communal effort. From the beginning of Kant’s work, Deontology has evolved quite a bit. However with these terms, distinctions, and explanations, one should now have a better fundamental understanding of the origins of Deontology.

² Garth Kemerling. “Kant: Synthetic *A Priori* Judgments.” Philosophy Pages. 2011.

³ Immanuel Kant. *Groundlaying toward the Metaphysics of Morals*. 2nd ed. 1786. 1.

Works Cited

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